

Title: Attaining to Righteousness

Text: Rom 9: 30-33

Date: September 21, 2014

Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Romans 9: 30: What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. 31: But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. 32: Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; 33: As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Our subject is “Attaining to Righteousness.” Righteousness is a state of moral perfection equal to and approved of by God. To enter God’s presence we must be righteous as God—as holy, just and good as God. Our text shows us how some sinners attained righteousness and why some sinners did not attain righteousness.

Be sure to get this: all God’s people, no matter who they are, attain righteousness the same way. So the way in which those in our text attained to righteousness is the same way in which all God’s people attain to righteousness.

THE WAY OF TWO PEOPLE

We have here a description of what two different people did to attain righteousness.

First, we are told that the Gentiles did nothing to attain righteousness—the Gentiles “followed not after righteousness.” (Rom 9: 30) The Gentiles did nothing to try to attain righteousness. The Gentile nations were totally ignorant of God’s righteousness. They never had the law which God gave to Israel at Mt. Sinai and were never under that law. Until God sent the gospel, God never gave the Gentiles any of the advantages he gave to Israel. They had no revelation from God, no word from God and no promises from God. Worse, they were ungodly, sinful, spiritually dead idolaters. Listen to God’s description of these Gentiles, “at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” (Eph 2; 12)

So get this, the Gentiles were totally unconcerned about righteousness. They were not seeking God; they were not trying to make themselves righteous before God; they were spiritually dead sinners who were totally unworthy of anything but hell and condemnation.

Secondly, we are told that Israel did try to attain righteousness—But Israel “followed after the law of righteousness.” (Rom 9: 31) Israel are the natural sons of Abraham, which made up the twelve tribes of Israel. God gave Israel the law at Mt. Sinai. Moses told them what God said about the righteousness which is of the law, “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” (Ro 10: 5) That is a true statement but it in no way says that any sinner is capable of keeping the law and living thereby.

But Israel went to work trying to attain righteousness by keeping the law, by the works of the law. They had a will to be righteous so they ran after righteousness—they were zealous. They toiled and labored after righteousness. They meticulously kept the Sabbath day, at least, as they regarded the Sabbath day ought to be kept. They paid their tithe, at least as they regarded the tithe should be paid, even tithing mint and rue and all manner of herbs. The ten commandments was their rule of life. They had traditions of their own as well. Concerning the righteousness which is of the law, looking at these folks outwardly, men would say,

“Blameless!” When men thought of righteousness, they thought of “the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.”

So here we have the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness: And we have Israel which followed after righteousness.

THE OUTCOME

The Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, “have attained to righteousness.” But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, “hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” (Rom 9: 30-31)

How could all Israel’s works not count for something? Here is why? “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Rom 3: 10-12) That is a description of every sinner, and it is especially a description of all those in Israel who attempted to attain to righteousness by their law-keeping. The reason no sinner can attain righteousness by the law is because we sinned in Adam. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom 5: 12)

What about the law God gave at Mt. Sinai? It was not given to attain righteousness thereby; it was given to declare us guilty. “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3: 19-20) “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.” (Rom 5: 20)

WHY THESE TWO OUTCOMES?

The Gentiles attained to righteousness because they believed on Christ—“What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.” (Rom 9: 30)

Israel did not attain to righteousness because they sought by the works of the law rather than by believing on Christ—“But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Rom 9: 31-33)

Be sure to get this: the Gentiles attained to righteousness, not by works, but through faith—through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. But Israel sought righteousness by the works of the law and stumbled—or refused to believe on Christ.

CHRIST IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the righteousness of God. The Holy Spirit says through Paul, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” (Rom 10: 1-4)

Sinners do not attain righteousness by doing but by submitting to the Righteousness of God, Christ himself. Christ is the end of the law for the believer because the believer is made righteous in Christ. It is because the

works of the law, the righteousness attained by the law, is finished by Christ. “What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom 8: 3-5) Christ is the Righteousness of God and the Righteousness which every sinner must have to be accepted of God. We are made righteous by God, by his Son, by his grace, through God’s gift of faith, not of ourselves. (Eph 2: 8-9)

RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF THE LAW

We cannot be saved by any law, by any doing of our own “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” (Rom 10: 5) If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal. 2:21). If a law could have given us life, then God would have given us such a law. (Gal 3: 21) All a law can do is set forth requirements and prescribe penalties for failure. Since we all fell in Adam and since we all fail all the time, the law prescribes penalties. The law cannot give us life. We never achieve perfect obedience in this life so we can never look to law for righteousness, even after we are brought to faith in Christ. We can never say that our past sins are covered by Christ, by grace, but now our righteousness depends on our obedience. The law has no part whatsoever in making a sinner the righteousness of God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF FAITH

There is not some great thing that we must encounter or reach for or feel or experience. That is what Paul means when he says, “But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*;) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)” (Rom 10: 6-7)

Faith is the gift of God given in the mouth and in the heart. “But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” (Rom 10: 8-11)

God makes Christ All unto us: Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption. (1 Cor 1: 30) By God giving us the gift of faith we believe on Christ with heart. We believe Christ is the Son of God, meaning Christ is the righteousness of God, the end of the law, my righteousness. We trust Christ has, is and shall save us. Therefore, we confess Christ with the mouth. The point is, that we are not ashamed to identify ourself publicly with Christ, “For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” When a sinner believes on Christ and publicly confesses Christ, “thou shalt be saved!”

May God use this to persuade us that the law has nothing whatsoever with making a sinner the righteousness of God, not before or after conversion. God’s people are made the righteousness of God—attain to righteousness—through faith in Christ alone by the grace of God alone.

Amen!